THE SPIRITUAL TEACHING OF THE
BENEDICTINE MONKS OF THE
CONGREGATION OF SANTA
GIUSTINA AFTER THE OPENING
SESSIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

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For some time I have been looking at the writings of an Italian Benedictine
order between 1480 and 1570, that is, about forty years before the Reformation
and fifty years after Luther’s famous tracts of 1520. This article attempts
to explain the curious fact that quite suddenly, in 1548, eighteen months after
the opening session of the Council of Trent, there began to appear amongst
the monks signs of a completely new style of piety which was markedly
different from anything the monks had expressed before. This piety was
strongly affective, being rich in emotional language which described souls in
rapture, ravished by passionate love and caught up in union with God. Not
surprisingly, it was also deeply tinged with eroticism. A choice example is to
be found in a tract a Benedictine monk wrote for a nun:

May you hear what the Lord, your God, speaks
within you . . . What could be more ravishing,
O daughter, than to hear intimate words uttered
to your heart by Christ Jesus — words no
man may utter — while all inside you
melts into love of the Spouse from Paradise.2

Passages of this kind mark the beginning of a new kind of spirituality
amongst these Italian Benedictines, and in this article I shall describe the
context of its sudden emergence and suggest an explanation in terms of the
disintegration of a particular tradition of biblical scholarship.

However, first of all, it is necessary to give an account of this order and
its teachings in the period before the Council of Trent. Those teachings
represent a very curious strand in 15th and 16th century intellectual history —
a strand which dropped out of sight during the later 16th century, and
has remained, as far as I know, in obscurity for the past 400 years or more.

The Benedictine Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua had its begin-

1. This article is the revised version of a paper given at The Concept of Spirit Conference.
2. Chronologia Sanctorum et aliorum Virorum Illustrium ac Abbatum Sacrae Insulae Lerensis,
ed. V. Barrali Salerno (Lyons 1603), part (ii), 232. ‘Audias quid Loquatur in te dominus
Deus tuus. . . quid suavius, filia, . . . quam ut ad cor tuum Christum Iesum arcana verba
loquentem audias quae non licet homini loqui . . . tota in amorem coelestis sponsi
liquefacta.’
nings in 1409, when the abbey of Santa Giustina on the outskirts of Padua, was reformed by Ludovico Barbo. The abbey flourished, and became the centre of a congregation of Benedictine monasteries, in which each monk owed obedience to a central chapter-general, and each house was ruled by abbots elected annually. This new system of government laid the basis for success: the Congregation of Santa Giustina grew in numbers, it attracted many humanist scholars, and acquired a reputation for biblical and patristic learning as well as for piety. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Congregation had been joined by monasteries from Sicily to Provence, notably Montecassino in 1505 (from which union the monks became known as the Cassinese Congregation, and are generally referred to simply as 'the Cassinese'). Thus, from the late 1400's the Congregation was an active centre of biblical and patristic studies. This in itself is interesting because it confirms the existence in Italy of organised pre-Reformation biblical studies, about which some scholars have speculated.

However, even more interesting is the fact that the monks concentrated heavily upon the interpretation of St. Paul according to the Greek Fathers, particularly St. John Chrysostom and others of the school of Antioch. This Greek theology which the Benedictines were expounding was quite distinctive and in marked contrast to the general run of teachings in 15th century Italy. The predominant piety, in both scholastic and humanist teachings, was of the *scala perfectionis* type, in which salvation was seen as a graded spiritual ascent to union with God — ascending through catharsis and illumination, or through ascetic imitation of Christ, or through transformation by love. Of course, such piety also drew upon the Bible and the Fathers, but for the most part did so merely to illustrate the ascent to salvation.

Of the three kinds of 'ascent' piety, the most popular in Italy was that of

union with God through affective experience — of transformation by the divine love, following Bernard’s idea of the soul detached from earthly things, transformed and drawn up the scale of love, beyond encumbrances of the flesh to mystical union with God. Italian scholastic writers taught such an ‘ascent’ piety, expounding (despite their Scotist sense of the gulf between God and man) a pattern of infused grace and progressive perfection through the responses of the will: the best example of this genre was the Observant Franciscan Angelo Carletti’s *Summa Casuum Conscientiae* which first appeared in 1486 and was still a best-seller when Martin Luther, affronted by its implications, burnt a copy in his bonfire at Wittenburg in 1520. However, the most zealous practitioners of ascent through affective experience were found amongst the humanists. A vivid example was Paolo Giustiniani, who became a Camaldolese monk in 1513. Giustiniani was a man obsessed with his interior disposition, and as he planned his withdrawal from the world, was equally fussy about the library he would need for his ascent through love. When he finally entered the monastery he brought with him the Bible and the works of Plato and Plotinus, Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Bernard and Albert the Great. He also read Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and appears to have known early Franciscan writings, though little of the *devotio moderna*. Using these sources copiously, he described salvation as an ascent from the bodily life to the spiritual life of illumination and regeneration through encountering the love of God. This pattern of salvation through spiritual love was based upon the antithesis between flesh and spirit which Giustiniani drew from various Pauline and patristic texts. Whereas other theologians found in Paul convincing reasons to deny salvation through perfection, Giustiniani’s exegesis sharpened the antithesis between flesh and spirit and buttressed his soteriology of *scala perfectionis* which, however, he expressed in terms of affective experience rather than in a Pauline doctrine of salvation. After great effort, Giustiniani attained an exalted state of ecstatic, abandoned, passionate love and union with God. He then died, in 1527.4

The Benedictines of Santa Giustina had strong scholarly links with the Camaldolese, as with other humanists. However they had no interest in any sort of ‘ascent’ soteriology. In contrast to *scalae perfectionis*, the Benedictines taught a theology of the Cross, of which the *leitmotif* is restoration rather than ascent, that is restoration of man to God’s favour and restoration of the divine image in man, by virtue of Christ’s saving act. Long before the Reformation, these monks were teaching a pattern of salvation of the ‘restoration’ type expressed in Pauline terms of sin, the Cross, grace

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4. There is a general survey of late medieval Italian piety in my *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation* (to be published by OUP in 1985) ch.1.
and faith, mainly using the exegeses of Augustine and Chrysostom: However, the kind of restoration they taught was not that of guilty and unjust man restored to a state of justice, but rather that of human nature now broken by mortality and suffering both in body and mind restored to life and health. They took these ideas from the Greek fathers, especially Chrysostom, and from the western tradition, particularly Augustine.

Indeed, the Benedictines were expounding a theology virtually unknown to the late-medieval western church. They held that mankind inherited the mortality of Adam, but not his guilt. Therefore, they said, the fundamental condition and problem of fallen man lies not in his being guilty, but rather in his being mortal and his human nature being damaged. Consequently, said the Fathers of Antioch, salvation must be understood, not in forensic terms of guilt and justification, but in terms of rescue from death and the healing of sick human nature. The rescue of mankind from death, they said, was an act of God’s grace, achieved by the death of Christ: Chrysostom called this the ‘benefit of Christ’. The subsequent healing of sick human nature he described as the restoration of *imago Dei* in man: this reconstruction was achieved through faith and good works.5

The Cassine Congregation expounded this pattern of salvation from at least the 1480s, and probably earlier. Following Chrysostom, they said little about guilt and justification: instead, they talked about the conquest of death by grace alone followed by the restoration of the image of God in man through faith which consisted of trust, love and good works. For them, grace alone, on the one hand, and grace with good works, on the other hand, were not alternative ways to salvation, but were simply two successive stages in their pattern of salvation which saw man rescued from mortality (by grace alone) and, once liberated from death, his human nature reconstructed through the therapeutic action of faith. Consequently, the monks were teaching salvation by grace alone, and also the necessity of works — with faith as the copula between God and man.

These teachings can be identified in nearly all fifteenth century writings of the Congregation that I have seen — biblical commentaries, sermons, letters, teaching texts and so forth. However, after 1520, as the Reformation debate reached Italy, the Benedictines began to find themselves in a difficult position, because in terms of their Greek theology, the conflict between the Reformers and Rome rested upon a false assumption common to both sides. Whether guilty man is justified and acceptable to God in part through his free will and good works (as the Catholics said), or through grace alone without reference to works (as the Protestants said), both views

rested upon the assumption that salvation was to do with the overcoming of guilt and the attainment of, or the accreditation of, a state of justice. Underlying their quarrel, both Rome and the Reformers perceived guilt as the problem of mankind. In contrast, the monks, following Chrysostom, took little account of guilt and justice *coram Deo*, and taught that salvation was through grace alone, but also that works were necessary to salvation. Such doctrines seemed heretical both to Catholic scholastics and to Protestants. The Cassinese monks were suspected on all sides of being Lutherans, or Pelagians, or both.

The Benedictines worked hard to defend their orthodoxy and to put forward their Antiochene pattern of salvation as the formula which could prevent the final, irrevocable rupture between Catholic and Protestant. A stream of literature — sermons, letters, tracts, poured from the cloisters of these scholarly monks. Don Isidoro Chiari wrote a lengthy appeal to the Protestants in 1537, which confronting the problem of free will and salvation, came much closer to the heart of the dispute than the much more famous but shallow *Consilium de Emendanda Ecclesia* of the same year: nevertheless Chiari’s work was almost completely ignored.6

These early engagements of monastic teaching with the problems of the Reformation were consolidated by Don Luciano degli Ottoni, who in 1538 produced a translation of Chrysostom’s commentary on Romans, to which Ottoni added his own commentary.7 This work clarified the teachings of the Congregation by relating them directly to Chrysostom. Ottoni set out to show that Chrysostom ‘preserved human liberty, yet in no way diminished grace’. Following Chrysostom closely, he argued that sin was a condition of mortality rather than guilt, and salvation was the restoration of wholeness rather than justification. He synthesised, in the Greek manner, salvation by grace alone and the necessity of works as an element of the faith by which shattered human nature is restored to pristine health. The monk’s teaching is to be distinguished from that of other Catholics, including those who propounded *duplex iustitia*, and from that of Protestants. However, at the

6. *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, chs.4-7. Chiari’s *Adhortatio ad Concordiam* was written in 1537 and published at Milan in 1540.

same time, it was open to mis-interpretation, since on the one hand it bore some resemblance to Protestantism, and on the other hand it seemed to be almost Pelagian. Consequently, the book fell under suspicion and was investigated at length by Domingo de Soto, the Dominican theologian to Charles V. A few years later, in 1543, another monk, Benedetto da Mantova, also tried to put forward his order’s teaching in his famous Beneficio di Cristo. There has been nearly 150 years of controversy over the question of whether the Beneficio was Protestant, or Valdesian in inspiration, but we may now recognise it to be neither, but simply another, and very powerful, exposition of Greek patristic theology.®

Despite the heightened atmosphere of suspicion and intolerance after the publication of Il Beneficio, the Congregation prepared to advance its doctrines at the forthcoming Council of Trent, and chose Ottoni and Chiari as its principal speakers. The opening sessions were a point of crisis for the Congregation. The monks threw everything into a last effort to apply the remedy of Chrysostom and Antioch to the deepening rift of western Christendom. But they failed at Trent. Even before the Council opened, Luciano degli Ottoni, who was their chief spokesman, again fell under suspicion of Pelagian heresy because he circulated a manuscript in which, drawing upon Chrysostom, he asserted that men did not inherit Adam’s guilt and that works were necessary to salvation.

In the Council’s opening sessions of 1546, Abbot Chiari spoke at length on biblical studies. He clashed with the scholastics and forced them on the defensive. In the debates on justification he argued the Cassinese case that men were justified ex sola gratia but also that works were necessary, not to justification, but to the restoration of human nature. Next, Ottoni expounded the doctrine of faith as the copula between God and man: he asserted that since faith is a gift of God, and human works are intrinsically linked to faith, faith cannot exist without good works. The same argument led him to assert that faith has its own kind of human certainty, and

therefore the true believer has eternal life. Having earlier been accused of Pelagian heresy, he was now suspected of being a Protestant. His speech, on 23 November 1546, caused an uproar, 'omnibus patribus uno ore acclamationibus' their condemnation of what they supposed to be Lutheran heresy. The decrees of the first session of Trent did not formally condemn the Cassinese doctrines, but they were brushed aside.9

The episode effectively put an end to the Cassinese attempt to remedy a western schism with Greek theology. Over the Congregation's subsequent history there hangs an air of anti-climax, disappointment and the gradual dissipation of its scholarly teachings, and it is here that the point of my article lies. In spirituality, the Cassinese Congregation split into three groups. First, there were the patristic scholars who continued to expound the order's traditional teachings drawn from the Greek Fathers of Antioch, especially the 'beneficio di Cristo’, though now they did so very cautiously, being aware that the eye of the Holy Office was upon them. A second group distorted the doctrine of works. In the traditional Cassinese teachings, works were a necessary part of faith, but this second group, inspired by Don Giorgio Siculo, turned traditional teaching into a legalistic obsession with good works, obedience to the laws of God, and punishment of disobedient sinners. In short, this second group was teaching a crude Pelagianism which was a shallow distortion of the Greek patristic theology expounded by the Cassinese Congregation.10 Finally, there was a third group, which consisted of men who began to distort the element of 'faith' in traditional teaching. They loosened the concept of faith from its biblical roots as interpreted by Chrysostom and presented it in terms of exaggerated emotional piety and warmth, often of a sexual kind. It is this third element in the Cassinese piety which disintegrated in the aftermath of Trent that I want to describe further in this article.

Denis Faucher, the monk whose 1548 letter to a nun I quoted earlier, was the first to write in this strongly affective style. Faucher was at Arles, in Provence, where amongst other things he guided a Benedictine women’s college for higher studies. In two tracts written in 1548 and 1549 he expounded the traditional Cassinese pattern of salvation as far as the point where 'faith' was seen as the crucial element in the restoration of human nature to the image of God.11

However, when Faucher moved from the restoration of imago Dei to a

9. Concilium Tridentinum, i, 60; v, 331–2, 475–8, 659–60; x, 776, 877. J. Hefner, Voten des Abtes Isidor Clarius vom Trienter Konzil(Würzburg 1912) pp.7–19, 40.
11. The two tracts are printed in Chronologia Sanctorum, ii, 220–48, 249–54. For references to the ‘collegium virginum’ and its higher studies, and Faucher’s difficulties with his spirited female students see 277, 310–11, 340.
description of the concomitant union with Christ, his pattern of salvation began to adopt strongly emotional tones. ‘O, happy soul’, he wrote, ‘who, burning with ardent desires calls unceasingly to the Lord’. His enthusiasm was ecstatic: the ‘will was inflamed with divine love’, the soul ‘dissolved into Christ with utter love’, and was ‘drunken with divine love’. At this point, Faucher’s doctrine of faith was stretched beyond the constraints of the Congregation’s traditional sober biblical scholarship, moving away from its focus upon grace and restoration, towards an idea of faith as a strong emotional experience. Faucher’s description of the union with God of a soul ravished by passionate love, employed the language of emotional faith tinged with the eroticism of the Song of Songs, exemplified in the passage quoted earlier.

Faucher wrote two tracts and numerous letters during 1548 and 1549. In all of them, this new, highly affective piety is prominent. In this respect, Faucher was veering away from the confident scholarly expositions that distinguished Congregational writings before the Council of Trent, towards subjective emotional warmth and excesses of piety. In this man at least, Cassinese theology began to drift from its strict biblical and patristic base: it was losing its balance and becoming prone to exaggeration. The traditional terminology of the Congregation was being employed to build up subjective devotion, moving from scholarly exposition to learned enthusiasm. It is difficult to say to what extent the failure at Trent and a loss of confidence contributed to Faucher’s tendencies, but the fact is that the failure of 1546 was followed by signs of new kinds of piety, less tied to biblical and patristic scholarship and more directed towards the Pelagianism of Siculolo and the affective raptures of Faucher. There exaggerations of traditional teaching — for such they were — were not isolated examples, but occurred elsewhere within the order and amount to a general disintegration of the order’s piety.

There is another striking example of the new affective piety at the monastery of Montecassino, in the manuscript known as Codex 584, an anonymous collection of sermons, letters, and poems and prayers. Codex 584 was mostly written and collected in the period after the Congregation’s defeat at Trent, in the 1550’s, at the point in the history of the Congregation when the old biblical and Greek patristic theology had begun to splinter. The codex has signs of traditional Cassinese teaching scattered throughout it — the creation of man in the image of God, the fall, the ‘benefit of the Cross’, faith, the healing of free will, and so on, but despite these signs, Codex 584 clearly marked a departure from the order’s customary doctrines. First, it contained strongly affective piety of the kind already observed in the later teachings of Faucher. Here, the principal emphasis was upon the

utter submission of the human to the divine will, and man losing himself as he begs God to ‘lift me, heart and soul, and consume me entirely in you, because in you I shall find you and myself’, reaching ‘annihilation of all his will and strength and knowing’. Thus, man is engulfed in the great sea of divine love until he is swept up into a spontaneous and violent passion, responding with joy to the kiss of ‘lo sposo’, carried away by ‘annihilation of self’ and ‘madness’ (pazia) of love. Such men, ‘without constraint, without fear, and free of sin’, are truly possessed of the ‘pazia’ for which man is created. Once again, such piety was clearly different from traditional Cassinese teachings, and Tommaso Leccisotti was correct to detect in it the influence of Catherine of Genoa, and was probably correct to see that of Paolo Giustiniani and the Company of Divine Love.13

A second difference is the very strong emphasis upon obedience and perfection of life according to the precepts of the Bible and the Benedictine Rule. Obedience is an important element in the Rule, and was to be found in the pattern of salvation expounded by earlier Congregational writers for whom it had occupied an important place amongst the good works which flow from grace and lead to the restoration of *imago Dei*. However, in Codex 584 we see obedience extended to constitute almost alone the prior part of the pattern of salvation, that is, the part which leads on to raptures and ecstatic union with God, whilst the Cassinese doctrines of sin, mortality and grace are of little or no significance. Moreover, not only does obedience — together with ecstasy — comprises virtually the whole pattern of salvation, the nature of that obedience is different from the old tradition. Here it has acquired a legalism of a paternal kind. Adam’s fall is seen in terms of disobedience and the punishment of exile from a loving father, whilst the obedience of the faithful soul is seen to remove that punishment and restore men to their position as loving and obedient sons of God, ‘O good Jesus, who are your beloved, if not *the lovers and sons of obedience*?’14

The third departure from traditional Cassinese piety is the remarkable paucity in Codex 584 of biblical and patristic references. The few references that do occur are used merely for illustration: there is nothing of the closely reasoned arguments, using Paul and Chrysostom, which are found in the earlier writers, especially Chiari, Ottoni, and Folengo. Consequently although the piety of the authors of Codex 584 is exceptionally fervent, it is not theologically grounded in the Bible, nor in the Fathers. These writings


14. Ibid., 73, ‘Qui sunt dilecti tui, o bone Iesu, nisi amatores et filii obedientie? Nam, sicut disobedientia Adam, et in Adam omnes homines de paradiso eiecit, et Dei inimicos constituit, ita obedientia ad celum reducit et dilectos facit.’ Also see 43–6, 52, 70–6, 79–95.
of Codex 584 were not adding an extra dimension of mysticism to the order's biblical and patristic scholarship, on the contrary their writings virtually discarded the Bible and the Fathers, using particular biblical themes, especially 'faith' and 'obedience', as a vehicle for mystical expression, but without any attempt at systematic exposition. Thus, its piety had little to do with the biblical and patristic scholarship which underlay the teachings of the Congregation.

In Codex 584 we see how the elements of faith and love and obedience, which had always been present in the Congregation's monastic piety, were now exaggerated and at the same time separated from the biblical and patristic scholarship in which they had once been securely placed. In this sense, it may be said that Cassinese piety was beginning to disintegrate into three strands — one strongly affective, another emphasising obedience and perfection, and the third the surviving old traditional piety based on Paul and Chrysostom. There is an explanation for these changes. The theological decrees of the first sessions of the Council of Trent excluded the Antiochene theology at the heart of the Congregation's teaching and devotion. Suddenly the monks found that the pattern of salvation which they had expounded with increasing determination and skill was now barely acceptable in the Catholic world: in turn this can only have shaken confidence in the biblical and patristic exegesis from which they had drawn their doctrine of salvation. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that there was a tendency for monks to concentrate upon inward and personal features of the old pattern of salvation, especially 'love' and 'good works'. These two emphases which are clearly recognizable as two elements of the earlier doctrine of 'faith', were perfectly acceptable in the climate of Roman Catholic spirituality after Trent — provided they were not pushed to extremes as Siculo had done. Nor is it surprising, considering the manner in which they were expounded, that the two elements became detached from biblical scholarship.

The same separation from theological scholarship is evident in the poetry of Don Leonardo Oddi of Perugia. About 1550, he composed several epic poems which clearly alluded to Cassinese teachings on sin, grace and faith, but which avoided any theological treatment of these themes. Instead, Don Leonardo described his Dante-like journey out of the wickedness and turmoil of this world, through the Benedictine way of virtue and perfection, to a state of bliss, delight and sweetness of faith 'apud benignissimum Deum'.

In 1552, Oddi was imprisoned by his Order for reasons that are not clear. It is possible that he carried to excess either his ecstatic raptures and visions, or his zeal for virtue and perfection — as was the case with Siculo, the chief
exponent of the Pelagian faction, who had been hanged by the civil authorities at Ferrara, less than a year earlier.\textsuperscript{15}

Changes similar to those observed in Faucher, Siculo and Codex 584 were also manifest in other writings of the Congregation. In 1556 Don Marco of Brescia published a tract which was part commentary and part meditation on the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. Don Marcus described the Last Supper as the promulgation of the new law, 'the law of life, the law of love', the 'sweet precepts' of which demanded love, humility, forgiveness, reconciliation, good works and peace. Obedience to this law was to be achieved through the will, for God deals with men 'not as underlings or servants, but his friends and free men' — Judas, for example, had not been compelled to betray Jesus, but did so only because he first betrayed himself to the devil. Obedience to this law would bring the knowledge of divine love: moreover the sacrament, a 'holocaust of sweet love,' would strengthen the heart and 'inebriate the soul' until the 'immense love' of Christ and its sweetness was utterly known.\textsuperscript{16}

The following year Marcus published another tract of three sermons on the eighteenth chapter of St. John, concerning the Passion. There were touches of the traditional Cassinese style, but these were few and the direction of the work was quite different in the style and content of its exegesis. Marcus was not concerned to analyse, explain or argue a pattern of salvation. Instead he took particular terms and elaborated them into quite extravagant physical descriptions: the garden was depicted as a sweet bower of vines, rosy apples, lilies and fragrant aromas into which Christ entered so that he could preach his law of love. For Marcus, the significance of the Passion was the teaching it exemplified, that is, love, even for enemies:

This is truly the distinctive doctrine of Christ, the extraordinary

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Miscellanea Cassinese ossia nuovi contributi alla storia, alle scienze e arti religiose}, ii (1897), Litteraria, 1-47. The principal poem is 'De Laudibus Montis Casini'. The poems were dedicated to Don Vincenzo of Naples, abbot of Montecassino and president of the Congregation. The MS of a rather more Christocentric poem is in Bibl. Univ., Padua, MS 439, ff. 1r-46r; the phrase quoted is taken from f.2v. Oddi's biographical details are in Armellini, \textit{Bibl. Bened. - Cas.}, ii,76. He was professed in 1536. The reference to his imprisonment is in Leccisotti, 'Tracce di Correnti', 115. Siculo was hanged 'senza forma di processo' in Ferrara, 23 May 1551. C. Cantù, \textit{Gli Eretici d'Italia} (Turin 1866), ii,98; B. Fontana, \textit{Renata di Francia, duchessa di Ferrara} (Rome 1889-99), ii,279. Fontana took his material from the Archivio Secreto Vaticano.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{In Dominica Coenam a Capite Ioannis tertio decimo usque ad caput decimum nonum, coenae amoris octo} (Brescia 1556), preface, A iii; A vi; Bi; B v; B vi. The tract is discussed briefly by A. Pantoni, 'Asceti Penitenti e Mistici della Congregazione Cassinese nei Secoli xvi-xviii', \textit{Benedictina}, xvi (1960), 250.
philosophy of Christian doctrine — to pray for your enemies, teaching him who has to suffer, and showing him who has to die.

Christ was thus a divine exemplar of love, piety, forgiveness, humility and so forth, in contrast to the present condition of mankind. The sermons continue in this fashion, with particular terms being used as an opportunity to expound obedience to the new law and the search for freedom from sin, true wisdom and love. Indeed the Cross is described solely in these terms, for the ‘immensa Dei beneficia’ meant for Marcus only liberty from the slavery of the devil and sin and a new life of obedience and love. This was his pattern of salvation. The rest of the Congregation’s old Antiochene theology had disappeared.

Similar changes are apparent in a manual of private meditation written at Montecassino in 1557 by Don Joannes Baptista Neapolitanus. This tract contains very many allusions to the traditional Cassinese pattern of salvation: the inclination of fallen man to evils and perversity, the Cross as ‘...beneficium... [et] Christi charitatem erga genus humanum’, the ‘beneficium scilicet mortem eius’ which cancels the ‘chirograph’ written by the fall, reconciles men to God, and offers salvation to the whole human race. Don Joannes employed the customary catena of biblical and patristic quotations, together with exhortations to be grateful and to bear tribulations with hope and perseverance. However, the main theme of the work was meditation, and the ways in which meditation is able to stir up a condition of love in the heart of a Christian. In particular, meditation upon the wounds of Christ, he said, inflames the soul with love and joy, hope, penitence and affection (the imagery of the Song of Songs and the story of Mary Magdalene were used to good effect). This affective response led the devout man to imitate Christ and to change his life (‘mutare vitam suam’). There were detailed instructions in the techniques of meditation and a prayer of adoration to recite, ‘O Sacratissima, amantissima et dulcissima vulnera Jesu’. It is not surprising that, whilst he made some references to Augustine, Ambrose and Chrysostom, by far the greatest of Don Joannes’ sources were the writings on divine love of Bernard of Clairvaux.

His emphasis upon ardent love was derived from the component of love in the concept of faith in earlier Cassinese writings. But, whereas other, earlier writers looked to theological clarity in speaking about God’s grace

17. *De Supplitio et Morte Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (Brescia 1557), ff.A4; A5; A8; B2; C4; E6, E7. The copy at Rome (Bibl. Aless, Fondo Antico, T.M. 67) is bound with *In Dominican Coenam*.

and man's faith, this monk looked inwards to meditate upon the experience of God's love and our response to it, and, finally, to attain a passionate union with Christ. There were other, frequent, manifestations of piety based almost entirely upon emotional experience rather than biblical exegesis - the kind of piety which had been almost unknown at the height of the order's scholarship. Now, by the 1560s there were men like Don Agostino da Maratea, of Naples, who studied intensely, ate and slept very little, dedicated himself to virtual silence and when he did speak, spoke only of spiritual matters; and Don Placido Petrucci, whose life was one of fervour, tears, pious meditation, intense study, ardent longing for divine love and speaking with tongues. Such spirituality may have been in tune with Catholic religion after the Council of Trent, but it was quite different from the Pauline and Antiochenic spirituality of the Congregation before Trent.

Thus by the 1560s, within twenty years of the opening sessions at Trent, the spirituality of this Benedictine order had disintegrated into three strands— one was the old piety, another was the Pelagian exaggeration of works, the third an exaggerated doctrine of faith to mean intensity of religious affection. From this point the Congregation went into a long slow decline. Scholarly books became fewer and fewer, some of the earlier works were revised in a more orthodox style of Tridentine Catholicism, and the monks slipped into obscurity until, in the early nineteenth century Napoleon delivered the coup de grâce, and suppressed the Congregation.

What are we to make of this story? On the basis of the material I have described it seems to me that strongly affective piety in sixteenth century Italy may have at least two distinct sources. The first source is the pre-Reformation and indeed much earlier tradition of 'ascent' to God through affective experience. Later sixteenth century devotional manuals and hymns have ample evidence of that tradition flourishing in the Baroque age after Trent. The second source of affective piety is that described in this paper, namely, the breakdown of a scholarly, biblical, Pauline, patristic pattern of reform into warmth of feeling. When any theology becomes mere piety the emotions always thrive, but when monastic theology becomes mere piety the emotions are positively florid. That, in short, is how we might interpret this aspect of religious history in mid-sixteenth century Italy.
